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# **STEIN CENTER CONFERENCE: PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGES IN LARGE FIRM PRACTICES**

## **MARILYN & EDWARD BELLET: A DEDICATION**

*William Michael Treanor\**

Fordham Law School is defined by its profound and extraordinary commitment to legal ethics and to the service of others. Tragically, this year we have lost two remarkable people who played a central role in establishing that commitment. It is difficult to imagine that any law school could ever have supporters more involved, encouraging, or dynamic than Ed and Marilyn Bellet. Ed and Marilyn were great benefactors of Fordham Law's ethics and professionalism programs, they were the torchbearers of a commitment that has spanned many years and generations, and they were great friends to so many of us. This issue of the Urban Law Journal is dedicated to their memory.

Marilyn Bellet was the daughter of Louis Stein, the creator and benefactor of the Law School's Louis Stein Center for Law and Ethics. When Lou graduated from Fordham in 1926, he opened his own law office in Union City, New Jersey, establishing a substantial clientele and helping many of his corporate clients go public in the 1940s. In the 1950s, Food Fair stores, one of his clients, asked him to become their president. He accepted, brilliantly leading the company to remarkable success. Eighteen years later, after guiding the company to increase its sales by 800 percent, Lou Stein retired.

But as Lou ended his career at Food Fair, his role as a leading legal philanthropist was just beginning. Lou had been a supporter of the Law School for many years, but he took that dedication to a new level in the mid-1970s. Lou decided that, in the wake of Watergate, it was critical that the legal profession rededicate itself to service and to ethics. He established the Fordham-Stein Prize, which has annually honored lawyers whose careers have embodied

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\* Dean, Fordham University School of Law. I am grateful to Jennifer Spencer for her assistance in the preparation of this essay and to John Feerick, Bruce Green, and Russ Pearce, all of whom shared with me their memories of the Bellets.

the highest ideals of our profession. He then created the Louis Stein Center for Law and Ethics, which has become known worldwide as a powerful force in educating the public about the importance of the rule of law and educating lawyers about the awesome responsibility their profession casts on their shoulders. Indeed, the Stein Center is without peer in legal academia. It has helped establish Fordham as a leader—indeed, the leader—in the field of legal ethics, and it has helped educate a generation of lawyers dedicated to advancing the public interest.

The importance of the Stein Center to Fordham Law School is evident from a simple stroll down the street. Walking past the Law School building, even a casual observer would note the prominence of the words “Stein Center for Law and Ethics” just below the name of the school on the building. The writing on this wall of the school encapsulates both how we see ourselves as a law school and the remarkable legacy of Louis Stein.

When Lou died in 1996, his daughter Marilyn vowed to carry on his work with the boundless energy and dedication her father had given to everything he did. Marilyn was her father’s daughter. Along with her sisters, she carried on the philanthropic works her parents had begun, at Fordham as well as at humanitarian, educational, and health-related organizations across the United States and the world. More than just an administrator of a foundation, Marilyn Bellet was a person dedicated to the fulfillment of her father’s vision—particularly his vision of a law school with ethics as its core value. Ed Bellet was equally committed to this vision. Part of the beauty of their dedication to the Law School was that it was shared between them, and also that it seemed a reflection of their deep dedication to one another.

Marilyn and Ed, like Lou, were not the kind of donors who simply write a check. Their support brought with it a deep investment to the organization. Each year on the eve of the presentation of the Fordham-Stein Prize, Marilyn and Ed would meet with the faculty directors of the Stein Center to hear an accounting of how their gift had been put to use that year. They wanted to ensure that their money was being used for the good we had promised it would do. They were also extraordinarily warm and generous and viewed their role as supporters of the *people* associated with the Stein Center, rather than just of a nebulous program. They consistently offered advice for the center and ideas about how the nation’s pre-eminent center for legal ethics could continue to grow and flourish. Each year, the Center directors would receive Christmas and Ha-

nukkah gifts and be invited to Bellet family birthday parties and special luncheons. Their connection to Fordham was unique and very special. Marilyn and Ed were involved in so much good throughout the country, yet their focus on the task at hand never wavered. They always showed a sincere and deep commitment to everything they were involved in through the Stein Center, right up through the last months of their lives.

The Bellets did much more than merely pick up where Lou Stein had left off. Though neither Ed nor Marilyn were lawyers, they saw with insightful clarity the importance of supporting and equipping the legal community with a strong ethical foundation. As a businessman, Ed worked often with lawyers and saw the importance of law to the maintenance of a civil society. To that end, the Bellets worked energetically to ensure the preservation and growth of the Center that bore their family's name, but even more than that, Marilyn and Ed sought to provide for the advancement of the members of this "extended family" they had created. One of the Stein Center's most vital initiatives is the Stein Scholars program, a competitive program for students who commit to following a particular public interest course through their law school career. These are students of the highest caliber whose training at Fordham equips them to become public interest practitioners of the highest caliber. Through the support of amazingly dedicated faculty and staff, the Stein Scholars program offers aspiring public interest lawyers a place that feels like home; a refuge for their law school experience. Marilyn and Ed Bellet took particular pride in the Stein Scholars' shortened form of self-identification—they call themselves the Steins. This label affirmed the deep feeling of family Marilyn and Ed already felt toward them. It would have been easy for the name "Stein Scholars" to become merely an abstraction for the students who bore the name. However, the recipients of this honor had the opportunity to meet and interact with the Stein family, with Marilyn and Ed and with Ruth and Ben Nathanson, Marilyn's sister and brother-in-law, who are also deeply committed supporters of the program. It was an experience that made the program even more meaningful to the Stein Scholars. The Bellets said they took great joy at seeing wedding announcements where a bride or groom proudly proclaimed the Stein affiliation.

Fordham has truly been a part of the Bellet family in the past, present, and future: in addition to Lou's connection, Marilyn and Ed's daughter Sally graduated from Fordham Law School in 1976. An exceptionally talented attorney herself, she is the vice president

of real estate development at Amtrak. In recent years, she has increasingly carried on her family's tradition of outstanding commitment to the School, supporting the Stein Center and its programs through her time, insight, and contributions. As an Honorary Chair of the Fordham Law School Centennial Committee, she has shown a commitment to the future of the School in which her family's lives have been so intricately woven. Through a lifetime commitment to public service and excellence in the law, Sally Bellet has maintained a philosophy of giving that was so long the hallmark of her family: she gives of her time and resources in a very special way, targeting what is most important and most needed in our profession. She is an exceptional attorney and friend to the Center, and I incredibly grateful to see her family's work expanded through her commitment to Fordham Law School.

In the last year of her life, Marilyn showed her commitment to legal ethics by organizing the inaugural Marilyn Stein Bellet Conference on Ethics and the Law in Hilton Head, South Carolina. The creation of this conference was characteristic of a project with Marilyn's touch. Upon moving to Hilton Head, she and Ed quickly began contributing to the community there. Marilyn joined the board of directors at Low Country Legal Aid and saw an opportunity to partner with Fordham Law School to champion the cause about which she cared so much. Marilyn passed away about a month before the conference was to happen. We were all overcome with sadness and loss. However, even as Ed mourned his wife, he insisted that the conference proceed as planned. He knew how committed his wife had been to the cause and how she had dedicated her life to fulfilling the vision of her father to educate lawyers on the primacy of ethics.

Ed afforded his wife the same tribute as she had afforded her own father. To lose Ed so soon after Marilyn's death was difficult to accept. He was an exceptionally caring man who, as John Feerick has noted, was "devoted in so many ways to the development of the programs and law and ethics that are at the core of Fordham Law School."

Before he died, Ed worked with his daughter Sally to establish a new chair at the Law School, yet another building block for the Center. At this year's Stein dinner, it gave me great pleasure to announce the creation of the Edward and Marilyn Bellet Chair in Religion, Morality, and Legal Ethics. We are all delighted that this chair will ensure that the names of the Bellets and Fordham Law School are forever linked in yet another extraordinary way.

To lose both Marilyn and Ed in the course of a matter of months is an unspeakable loss. Their departures leave a void that will never be filled, and the value of their contribution to Fordham Law School can never be put into words. The dedication of this volume to Marilyn and Ed Bellet is just one more small way to extend their extraordinary legacy.